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ABSTRACT

Students arriving in the language department at Heriot-Watt University (Scotland) who study two languages arrive deficient in both languages and often in English as well. Generally, students have little knowledge of current and international affairs or the history and culture of the countries whose languages they are learning. However, they believe they can translate, have developed odd habits, and often believe only one version of a translation is possible. They have no theoretical background to provide a frame of reference for further professional training. At Heriot-Watt University, discourse analysis is incorporated into the translating curriculum from the introductory level because many of the techniques involved are transferable from translating to interpreting. In the early stages of training for translators and interpreters, a course in discourse analysis lays the foundation for construction of a methodology for: (1) determining the anatomy of a source text, written or oral; and (2) developing a systematic approach to transcoding written and oral texts from source to target version. If acquired initially for the generally slower processing of written text, discourse analysis techniques will be spontaneously transferred to the processing of oral text. (MSE)

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Common Ground in Teaching Translation and Interpreting : discourse analysis techniques

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This paper has two parts. First, it provides a profile of British students when they join the undergraduate course in Interpreting and Translating at Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh, where interpreting and translating are studied from first year. Second, it describes the training provided for translators in the department. Discourse analysis is considered to offer the most practical, and successful, pedagogics, which can be shared by translating and interpreting.

Student profile

Students, who read two foreign languages, arrive with weaknesses in both languages, and, frequently, also in English.

They have, generally, little knowledge of current and international affairs, of the history and the culture of the countries whose languages they are learning.[1]

On the other hand, they arrive with two priceless advantages for the teacher: they have proven ability (testified in school leaving certificate marks) and they are highly motivated - a combination which must not be stifled or disappointed by what we offer in the tertiary sector.

These weaknesses and advantages apply in the teaching of translating and interpreting. But there is one further negative factor which applies to translating: students come with the belief that they know how to translate. As is the case with their mother tongue, they have practised translating for years. They know how to express themselves in English, they have done translations at school, for at least five years. Yet this does not mean that they know how to translate. Furthermore, they may believe that only one version of a translation, the teacher's, is possible, or even permissible. They do not know why their version is inadequate. They have no resources with which to discuss the inadequacy. They are not aware that there are recognised approaches to, and methods of, translating.

They have, in sum, no theoretical background, which will provide a framework of reference with the help of which the activity of translating can be systematically, not merely intuitively, carried out.[2]

The Training Programme

At the introductory stage, the programme focusses on those concepts which are straightforward, easily identifiable, and which form the body of the discourse analysis method. It provides information on the concepts which underlie the transcoding of a source into a target language, and guidelines for decision-making before, during, and following the transcoding. The progression involves such procedures as determining the purpose of the text, the date when it was written, perhaps the political affiliation of the author, then potential linguistic problems in the text, and finally, carrying out revision, editing, assessment. A more advanced level, in the case of translating, includes study of different approaches to translation and assessment of their strengths and weaknesses. Grammatical, cultural and interpretative models and the methods associated with them are discussed, and each is applied to the same source text or texts to see how the target result differs according to each of the methods.[3] Another area which is appropriately reserved for advanced study is semiotics, which, to be properly understood, requires of the student maturity and experience in translating and interpreting.

Some, if not most, of the framework will be transferable from translating to interpreting.[4]

The basic constituents of discourse analysis which are immediately relevant in the training of translators.

From a teaching perspective an essential distinction should be drawn between macro- and micro- processing. The former has to do with the external factors which have had some form of influence - world events, political affiliation of the writer, date when the text was written, for example - on the source text. In other words, we are focussing on extralinguistic context and reading the text with such influences in mind; we are forming assumptions, based on extralinguistic features, concerning the meaning and purpose of the text, and establishing why the writer chose certain expressions, certain lexical items etc. Micro-processing, on the other hand, involves analysis, or processing, of a text in terms of its discourse constituents such as field, tenor, mode, cohesion, coherence, purpose (pragmatic dimension), meaning (semantic structures). [5] A further constituent which could be introduced at this stage is that of text-type - "a text-typology is a conceptual framework enabling the classification of texts in terms of communicative intentions". Hatim (1984) distinguished "three major contextual foci, subsuming a number of others" exposition, argumentation, instruction. Text-types are, generally, non-discrete variables, as are other text constituents. Co-occurrence of different text-types depends upon the purpose/s of the writer, or speaker, and identification of the text-type or a shift of text-type in the source text will assist in determining an appropriate shift of focus in the target text. [6] Macro- and micro- processing assist in the determining of text constituents which have to be taken into account when transcoding. The processes are transferable from translating to interpreting.

Success of any theoretical component in vocational training is judged, by students and teachers, by its relevance and applicability to the skill being acquired. Relevance and applicability of the discourse analysis constituents mentioned earlier are easily demonstrable through the use of carefully selected texts which have an abundance of the constituents eg. advertisements.

But texts should also be taken randomly, perhaps selected for reasons of topicality, rather than for their yield in discourse analysis constituents. Such texts may reveal a limited range of constituents - but, some constituents will be there nevertheless.

During this introductory stage of training, discourse analysis as applied in terms of the framework outlined earlier is, as it were, an artificial learning device - as are most classroom activities - since of necessity it treats constituents as if they were discrete (isolated), which is an unrealistic way of dealing with language. Discourse analysis, as applied by the advanced level student and the professional translator and interpreter, becomes a spontaneous, complex, and constant process.

A checklist for the translator and interpreter, in a learning or professional context.

This should reflect the questions asked by the teacher during the early stages of learning, that is, a series of questions such as: Am I selecting the correct adverbial?(cohesion) Is the collocation correct? Is there a pragmatic dimension involved? Would structural changes in the sentence improve the version I am offering? Am I following the logic of the source text?(coherence) Is the level of formality appropriate?(tenor) Is the text-type changing?[7]

Conclusion

In the early stages of training of translators and interpreters a course in discourse analysis lays the foundation for construction of pedagogics for i) determining the anatomy of a source text - written and oral, and ii) developing a systematic approach to transcoding written and oral texts from source to target version. Ground common to both skills or disciplines has been indicated. If acquired initially for the (generally) slower processing of written text, techniques of discourse analysis will be spontaneously transferred to the processing of oral text. [8]

Notes

1. Area Studies courses tackle non-language deficiencies.

2. It would be regrettable if the only reason to acquire a theory of translating were to bestow on the discipline some sort of respectability. Rather, the theory should be looked on as providing a conceptual basis for practical application in the classroom and in professional life.

3. Models of translation theory are: grammatical, cultural and interpretative. To each is attached two methods: the traditional grammatical and formal linguistic methods, the ethnographical-semantic and dynamic equivalence methods, the discourse analysis and hermeneutic methods.

4. It is advisable, at undergraduate level, to have translation studies underway before embarking on interpreting. An initial gentler pace of learning, and remedying of weaknesses, will establish proper practices in the written code which can then be transferred more easily to the oral.

5. The list is not exhaustive, rather it is selective in terms of appropriateness at an early stage of training.
   A glossary with examples could be made available to students.
   Once the terminology is acquired it should be in use throughout training.

6. There is normally, since we are dealing with language, a considerable degree of interdependence of the elements which make up the written or oral text profile that emerges from analysis. Text cohesion is dependent

on coherence, the pragmatic dimension is dependent on context, as is tenor, and so on.

7. The list is non-sequential.

8. It is possible that the translator may have more time than the interpreter to check, revise, edit, etc., but this is not always the case.

Hatim, Basil. 1984. "A Text-typological Approach to Syllabus Design in Translator Training". The Incorporated Linguist 23.3. 147-149.

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